

# SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

December 11, 1965

The Saturday morning session began with the annual business meeting at 8:30 a.m. in the Cleveland Room. The minutes of the meeting are recorded elsewhere in the Proceedings. At 10:30 a.m. a panel discussion of 'Concerns and Practices in Cutting Selection' was conducted. Mr. James S. Wells served as moderator.

## INTRODUCTION

JAMES S. WELLS

*James S. Wells Nursery*

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In preparation for this meeting I spent a few quiet evenings, last month, reading through the Proceedings of the meeting in Rochester. I did this, of course, with particular interest because, unfortunately, I was not able to attend. But I do this every year and what never ceases to amaze me is the mass of information which is poured forth at these meetings. As one contemplates the whole picture, it is surely clear that the work of the plant propagator has become a science as well as an art, and in the operations of our Society we see a unique blending of these two facets of human behavior.

As I read, I was collecting my thoughts for this introduction and I believe that one of the most clear aspects which comes to the top of this mass of information is the greatly increased efficiency in propagating techniques which we have acquired over the past twenty years, especially in the propagation of a much wider range of plants, from cuttings.

I was thinking back to the training which I received as a young man on my father's nursery. It was considered essential that we take the most meticulous care of every operation involved in our work. Some of the things which were required make strange reading, now. For instance, it was almost mandatory that we use "good sharp sand." But what was meant by this was never defined. When the truckload of sand was delivered from the source we knew to be the best, the propagator would go out and feel a little between his fingers and then would repeat the magic formula, "good sharp sand." We were required to fill pans with this sand, or any rooting medium, and to pound it firmly to be sure it was really hard before the cuttings were inserted.

The cuttings themselves were carefully cut and graded to a uniform and quite minute size. Once they were inserted, watering was carried out by hand, using a watering can rather than a hose, and with water from a tank which had been carefully brought up to greenhouse temperature. These and many simi-

lar procedures were considered essential to success, and successful we were, to a degree.

But the ease and relative simplicity with which we now propagate vast quantities of plant material under a mist system, or by the Phytotektor method, or perhaps using the Burlap Cloud, makes us realize that we have both simplified our systems and adopted new ideas and techniques which have immeasurably increased our efficiency. This increased efficiency has been due, in no small measure, to an increased understanding of how plants work. We have examined most of the internal and external factors which affect the development of the plant material and have determined, with some degree of accuracy, the optimum conditions for reproduction.

This Panel has been assembled with the thought of considering the four facets which can combine to achieve first class production. We hope to show how these facets react, one with the other, and properly combined, produce a substantial propagating force which can enable us to root, from cuttings, many plants which might previously have been considered difficult.

We have somewhat arbitrarily limited our speakers to five minutes in the hope that they will reduce their comments to pithy and pungent sentences which will arouse your interest and perhaps your disagreement. We want to leave plenty of time for you to exercise your prerogative to speak.

Our first speaker will be Merton L. Congdon.

## **TIMING AND ITS RELATION TO CUTTING SELECTION**

**MERTON CONGDON**

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I feel most fortunate in having the subject of "Timing" assigned to me because I believe in the past I have devoted as much to timing as to any other problem in propagation. Certainly, we have led off this discussion with the proper topic. If we do not select our cuttings at the right time there is not much point in continuing the discussion because we are not going to have any cuttings to discuss, at least in the more difficult subjects. In the easier subjects we are going to be laboring under unnecessary difficulties.

I should tell you that my experience is limited mostly to a wide range of deciduous shrubs and a few of the easy broadleaves. Also, it is entirely to outside bed work either with conventional sash or intermittent mist. So you see when this discussion turns to such items as Evergreens, Rhododendrons and Azaleas or to elaborate glass-house installation, I am entirely out of my realm. My observations, however, are that a lot of effort has been put into elaborate installations to try to bend the ways of nature to the will of the propagator when in many cases, a more desirable result may be obtained in working more closely *with*